

# SOLIDARITY

A Journal of Libertarian Socialism. Issue 14. Summer 1987. 80 Pence



## **The Monocled Mutineer**

**When the truth won't make good television**

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## **Sex as Work**

**Just another alienating job**

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Photo: BBC Television

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Solidarity is also the imprint of a series  
of pamphlets and books which now numbers  
more than sixty titles; and which have  
been variously translated into fifteen  
foreign languages. A list of those titles  
currently in print will be found  
elsewhere in this issue.

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Publishing history. The present Solidarity  
Journal is the latest in a line of  
magazines produced by the Solidarity Group  
and stretching back to the early sixties.  
Solidarity for Workers Power, first in  
this sequence, was founded in 1960 and ran  
to 89 issues. This was succeeded by the  
nationally produced Solidarity for Social  
Revolution which ran to 16 issues and was  
in turn succeeded by the current journal.  
Our publishing history is complicated  
further by the existence in the sixties  
and early seventies of six or seven  
regional Solidarity magazines, among them  
those produced by the Scottish, South  
Wales, and North Western Solidarity  
groups; and by the publication of the  
shortlived, nationally produced,  
Solidarity for Self Management.

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Printed by the Aldgate Press, London.



## DOCUMENTARY DRAMA

# Cherished myths of radical action

Television drama about radical moments in history often appears to be at odds with historical truth. KEN WELLER looks at two recent examples of the genre and sifts out fact from socialist fantasy.

THE ETAPLES MUTINY of September 1917, the first major outbreak of resistance by British troops during the First World War, was an event of major historical significance. But it was only a beginning. At the end of the war British and Imperial forces were shaken by wave after wave of revolts involving thousands of servicemen and women. This unrest, of which the Etaples events were a forerunner, crippled the British government's ability to intervene effectively against the Russian revolutionaries, the Irish nationalists, and even against a massive strike wave at home.

It is interesting that apart from a book by Tom Wintringham (*Mutiny*, Stanley Nott, 1936) the socialist movement virtually ignored these upheavals until 1975, when Doug Gill and Gloden Dallas published an article based on original research ('Mutiny at Etaples', *Past and Present*, November 1975) which was part of a much longer work (*The Unknown Army*, Verso) finally published in 1985 after ten years of rejection slips. Solidarity entered the field in 1976 with Dave Lamb's *Mutinies 1917-20*, still in print.

Why was there this fifty-year deafening silence? Could it be that the existence of such a mass movement, not led by any vanguard



Nicola Cowper as rural schoolgirl Violet Potter and Eileen Atkins as radical headmistress Kitty Higdon, in the BBC television drama 'The Burston Rebellion', based upon the events of an actual school strike in a Norfolk village on the eve of the First World War.



party or professional revolutionary leaders, threatened the ideology held by most of Britain's intellectual elite of their right to rule? Since about 1980 First World War mutinies have become quite trendy, and it is depressing to see documentary dramas which profess to be true accounts of these tremendous events gut them of their content of autonomous action by the participants in order to fit them into the lovable but dumb 'warm puppy' vision of the working class which so conveniently reflects the corporate self-interest of the intelligentsia.

In 1979 there appeared The Monocled Mutineer by William Allison and John Fairley (Verso), an account of the life of one Private Percy Toplis, who is described on the cover as 'mutineer, racketeer, master of disguise, rake and rogue'. This is a sensationalised journalistic melange which - to put it mildly - made no serious contribution to our knowledge of the unrest in the armed forces in the latter part of the war. This book, with its factual content even more attenuated, was the basis of the recent BBC television series.

It is not often that Solidarity has commented on literary matters, but the furore which followed the showing of Alan Bleasdale's screen play of The Monocled Mutineer has led to some confusion among socialists, who, seduced by its beautiful photography and fine acting - a sort of The Jewel in the Crown in khaki - and by its superficial radicalism, have sprung to its defence. There is a tendency among some leftwingers to see socialism as a sort of conspiracy in which socialists should keep silent and defend 'our side' in any dispute, whatever their reservations. This attitude has a long history. Unfortunately, much of what has been defended, from Stalinist Russia to the Workers Revolutionary Party, from the London Borough of Lambeth to the

leadership of Arthur Scargill, from the New Jewel Movement of Grenada to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, has not been 'our side' at all, but an expression of authoritarian statism created in the interests of an actual or potential bureaucracy.

## Myopic vision

The row about The Monocled Mutineer series has at least three aspects. First, the programmes, which were advertised by the BBC as the true story of real people, profoundly distorted the events of the Etaples mutiny, even to the extent of importing Percy Toplis, who was almost certainly not even there, still less a leader. Toplis was in fact a rather unpleasant criminal wanted for brutal attacks on French women, and to turn him into a picaresque hero was grotesque. Second, sections of the press used the uproar over the series to campaign against 'left wing' infiltration of the BBC. This onslaught led to a pavlovian defensive reaction from many socialists (though why we should feel protective toward elitist media fat-cats baffles me). Third, perhaps the most important aspect of the affair is the political content of the series. The mutiny is shown as a brutal chaotic mess, complete with an invented rape scene; the participants are depicted as a pretty dim lot whose main aim in life is to hand over leadership of the struggle to Toplis, who then takes the dangerous mob in hand, takes all the decisions, organises everything, and at the end is seen, the outsider hero, walking off into the sunset like Clint Eastwood.

All this would be quite small beer if this sort of treatment were an isolated event, but a huge proportion of the output of our middleclass 'lefty' media scene has the same flawed approach. A large proportion of the productions related to the working class tend - there are of course honourable exceptions - to reflect the social



vision and ambitions of the social strata which produce them; that is, that working people require expert leaders to achieve anything.

Another recent example of this factional television 'egalitarian drama' was The Burston Rebellion (also BBC), in which two teachers move to a village in Norfolk before the 1914-18 War. They lead a struggle against the farmers and the church, organise the local agricultural workers, and eventually found the Burston 'rebel school'. The local inhabitants are, as usual, pleasant but dim yokels. In fact, Burston had been a centre of agricultural trade-unionism since at least the 1870s, and a fertile ground for radical (religious) Non-Conformity for at least a hundred years before that. This tradition continued into the twentieth century, and indeed the Burston rebel school was founded under the auspices of the Primitive Methodist chapel. This illustrates the continuity of local struggle; but this was ignored in the programme.

What we see is no aberation, but rather the systematic, if sometime unconscious, downplaying or writing-out of the autonomous role of the working class, combined with a strong emphasis on the essential role of an elite, which clearly reflects the actual or potential interests of the media professionals.

This problem, however, goes far deeper than mere television programmes or even literature. We can see the same approach in labour history too. Over and over again the real struggles of the working class have been portrayed as a vague backdrop before which the union leaders or politicians have acted. There are of course many exceptions, notably E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class (Gollancz, 1965), which made a promising start in uncovering our history, but unfortunately ends in 1832 (we look forward to further

volumes!). Interestingly enough, Thompson devoted a chunk of his book to a sustained critique of what he called 'the Whig historians', who perceive the working class primarily as victims - and victims of course need rescuers - not as active agents of social change. Significantly, the book has been the subject of sniping attacks from sections of the marxist left, especially those influenced by structuralism, for not stressing 'theory' sufficiently. We may suspect that these critics are really complaining of an insufficient role for the 'possessors of theory', i.e. themselves.

The ideological chain into which The Monocled Mutineer is bound stretches yet further. If the outside hero or heroine is essential, what is more reasonable that they should be given privileged access to the good things of life so that they can better devote their attention to improving the lot of the working class without having to worry where the next five-course meal is coming from? One doesn't have to go to the USSR for examples; a glance at the 'left' in office in Lambeth or the GLC reveals a systematic attempt to 'clientise' the working class. And thus they express in the real world the outlook of The Monocled Mutineer. The ideology of the traditional socialist movement has come to reflect the individual and corporate interests of the actual or potential state parasitocracy, and as such has not the slightest connection with egalitarian socialism or freedom.

KEN WELLER

● 'The Burston Rebellion', written by Elaine Morgan, directed by Norman Stone. BBC 1. Broadcast 24th February 1985.

'The Monocled Mutineer', written by Alan Bleasdale, directed by Jim O'Brien. BBC 1. Broadcast in four parts commencing 31st August 1986.



## THE MONOCLED MUTINEER

# A frank and comradely exchange of views

The BBC series 'The Monocled Mutineer' was based upon the events of the Etaples mutiny in 1917. While the Corporation's advance publicity billed the programmes as historically accurate, serious doubts were cast upon their authenticity by, among others, the series' own historical advisor, JULIAN PUTOWSKI. In response to his criticisms he received a barrage of vilifying attacks. He also found himself engaged in several sharp exchanges with ALAN BLEASDALE, who wrote the scripts. In the fond hope that it may illumine the political attitudes of the 'egalitarian left', we print one of them here, a letter from Putowski to Bleasdale. In the letter the historical advisor answers paragraph by paragraph the dramatist's retorts - which he quotes verbatim - to points about the series raised in his preceding letter.

From JULIAN 'GUFF' PUTOWSKI, bemused part-time military history researcher (in braver moments a libertarian socialist), London, to ALAN BLEASDALE, irate self-confessed 'romantic socialist', playwright and author, Liverpool.

Dear Alan,

I'm sorry I haven't replied to your letter of 6th November until now - helping to set up workers' co-ops in Hackney, supporting anti-fascists opposing the National Front during the Armistice Day weekend, and sharing discussions with libertarian and other socialists attending the Leeds History Workshop Conference, have all delayed the considered response I feel your writing has always deserved.

Any direct verbal exchange between us about 'The Monocled Mutineer' would (on the basis of what you say) probably be unproductive or impossible. However, I feel you would agree that even a half-hearted dialogue between comrades and erstwhile workmates is far better than an angry monologue, so I've decided to present your views and my response to them in the form of a written exchange of conjecture and refutation.

JP: "I'd be grateful if you'd give me permission to quote you in print from some letters we exchanged during the production of 'The Monocled Mutineer'.

AB: You do not have my permission to quote from any letters I have written to you.





Dramatist Alan Bleasdale, whose television credits include 'No Surrender', 'Boys From The Blackstuff' and 'The Monocled Mutineer'. He has also written two novels, and a musical about Elvis Presley.

JP: But I won't quote you out of context or fabricate opinions you wouldn't have subscribed to when you wrote about the production when preparing the script... not even a 'Maybe' or a 'Just possibly'? I wrote you such a civil letter requesting your permission.

AB: I cannot even begin to comprehend why you continue to write to me in the most friendly of terms.

JP: But I thought we'd been friends since we first encountered each other in March 1982 - and directly and indirectly both of us have spent many harmonious hours working on 'The Monocled Mutineer'. You've never exchanged harsh words with me till now.

AB: Are you blind and ignorant not

to know what your hysterical ramblings have done?

JP: I would have had no reason to ramble, hysterically or otherwise, had not the BBC publicity circus proclaimed 'The Monocled Mutineer' to be historically true. They placed me in an impossible position, which I'm sure you well appreciate. You could always present your interpretation as a work of fiction based on known facts and events in the life and bleak death of Percy Toplis. As the BBC-designated Historical Advisor I was expected to support as historically correct events which I'd always insisted were either questionable or untrue. Your categorisation of my criticisms of the BBC and Alison and Fairley [Editors: authors of the original book] should be tempered by a dash of humility. You are a relatively well-off successful playwright who could weather adverse criticism and still get work. My research activities rely on supplying those who engage me with accurate data. If I didn't make it plain that I didn't subscribe to the much-touted "historical accuracy" of the series then it is most unlikely I'd ever have been given similar commissions again.

AB: Did you not realise that the filth of the far right would be waiting for you with open arms?

JP: I asked a good many non-right wing papers and journals whether they would be interested in mounting a considered and informed evaluation of 'The Monocled Mutineer' with no result.

AB: How could you really expect anything else to happen with your puerile press release other than that you would end up being bedded by the Daily Mail, and then get all of us fucked across the news stands of the nation by the Telegraph and The Sunday Times?

JP: My press release was not produced without a good deal of consideration. Mary Kenny's



objections to the prurient rape scene; friends' queries about my advice concerning the demoted officer's execution; the BBC's silly "true story" oversell of the series; Allison's cheap remarks at the premiere; and your words being quoted in Murdoch's scab press, made it clear that there was going to be a very public fuss about the historical veracity of the play. The Daily Mail's invented interviews, regurgitated by The Sunday Times and Daily Telegraph, stating I called the series a "tissue of lies", were rubbish, and lacking money to sue them in the bourgeois courts I complained to the Press Council about these newspapers' unethical behaviour.

AB: What do you think you have achieved with your petulance, cowardice and panic at the prospect that letters to The Times might have damaged your already negligible standing as a historian?

JP: I achieved no more than the BBC managed when it ignored the hard-worked advice it had commissioned, and (rather discourteously) eliminated almost all references to my contribution in helping the production. They also ensured any reservations I may have extended were not voiced to the press at 'The Monocled Mutineer' preview. Was not the Corporation cowardly in its failure to admit it had treated the series's researcher shabbily? Letters to The Times harming my "negligible standing as a historian" escaped my attention because (in support of the Wapping pickets) I don't read the newspaper. If my reputation is negligible, then why did you ask the BBC to re-engage me for a second term after the initial production had collapsed? If it was part of your charitable desire to give a handout to an ill-paid Adult Education worker then I applaud your generosity, but there may have been no need to do so if Allison and Fairley were as historically accurate as they claim.

AB: I can tell you one grotesque

and terrible achievement - that in these bleak times you have set back the cause of egalitarian drama a full generation.

JP: Phew! I didn't think that even the Tory Party could manage that. Does this mean that we're reduced by the Lord Chamberlain to having to rely on such aged historical mediocrities as Bertold Brecht and Jean Genet? Or do you mean that 'The Monocled Mutineer' was a specimen of egalitarian drama? If it's the former, then my achievement is indeed terrible, but Ionesco, Frisch and Anouilh would have appreciated the grotesqueness of the situation. If it's the latter, then I reckon you should review your estimate of the series' political 'egalitarianism'.

The portrayal of the mutineers as a bunch of drunken thugs may have been faithful to the book, but it smacked of conservative stereotyping. Exactly how much do you trust the working class (even in khaki) when they decide to challenge their so-called masters? Where were the positive images of rebellious squaddies thinking and acting for themselves (as opposed to carrying the whims of self-appointed leaders)? Your portrayal of women was equally regressive - reproducing in part the book's crass stereotyping of women into prostitutes, hapless victims, bonnie lasses or soft-hearted lady bountifuls. The BBC may well have found your consistent interest in victims to their taste, but I thought that even Filofax socialism had a category for inspirational drama in its didactic section. 'The Monocled Mutineer' did far less for the cause of anti-militarism than 'Oh! What a Lovely War!', 'King and Country', and 'All Quiet on the Western Front' - except for yet another collection of macho cameos for the lads and some tit-flashing to liven up BBC TV's viewing figures it did not depart far from the Dallas-in-drag-plus-bangs fare of TV period war drama.

The British broadcasting media



don't have a startlingly brilliant reputation for encouraging egalitarian drama, otherwise there would be far more work opportunities for women writers and artists, black people's drama and dramatists, and... we won't mention Ireland. I haven't set back egalitarian drama a full generation, because 'The Monocled Mutineer' did not represent an advance in the direction of egalitarianism, and also because the responsibility for encouraging or retarding the development of drama lies with individuals and organisations far more powerful than either of us... as writers like Trevor Griffiths know all too well.

AB: Despite your limp denials, you must have known that without your ammunition the enemy would not have

been able to fire on this production.

JP: If by "enemy" you refer to the Tories and their Fleet Street reptiles, then they had ammunition enough without either my disclaimer or letters of criticism (almost wholly directed at the book). By the time the premiere was mounted I think the BBC had already decided I was no longer "part" of the production.

How could I have betrayed this subtle egalitarian media initiative when I wasn't even party to the conspiracy? I always thought the conspiracy view of left-wing radicalism was part of the Tories' arsenal of demonic inventions. If you think you're part of a radical conspiracy to transform TV drama, forget it. If such a conspiracy



Etaples camp as it looked from a passing train only a matter of weeks before the September 1917 disturbances. On the French coast near Boulogne, Etaples was a base camp for the front at Passchendaele, Belgium, 60 miles north-east. At any one time as many as 50 thousand troops would be quartered, waiting to be sent up the line. On the right is the YMCA hut which offered soldiers free tea and newspapers.



does exist outside the fevered limits of crypto-fascist fantasists then past experience suggests that such schemes are (a) ineffectual - mass organisation and sustained activism by the oppressed promotes radical change, not childish plotting, and (b) counter-productive - when such initiatives are exposed, the ruling class uses them to trigger pogroms directed at progressive political elements. Or... do you really mean there was a clandestine Bolshevik conspiracy within the BBC? Oh well, you can be in my conspiracy if I can be in yours.

AB: Not only did you desert a radical cause, you took guns to our reactionary foes.

JP: What's all this "our" business? I'm no romantic socialist. Life in Hackney doesn't permit Brigadoon daydreams. I recall that though alcohol-loaded and very tired after a night's script-labouring a few years ago we discussed personal political objectives. I wanted revolution (immediately, if not sooner), you wanted things to stay as they were then (circa the Falklands War!). I haven't changed my point of view; have you changed yours? If not, then politically, at least, there's no "us". Your cause appears to be to get your writings published and screened. To do so requires compromises in the form and content of your creations - the result represents no radical cause. If what you produced were really a radical cause, do you think your material would be permitted on TV screens?

As for the gun-running bit, the only criticisms I've voiced about 'The Monocled Mutineer', aside from my disclaimer, have appeared in such unexceptional publications as the Guardian, Listener, and Hampstead and Highgate Express... plus an article in the Western Front Association's journal Stand To. For the most part my scribbles have related to Allison and Fairley's extravagant claims about their book's accuracy, not the TV



Paul McGann as Etaples rebel Percy Toplis, in the BBC production 'The Monocled Mutineer'. It now seems possible that the figure on which the part was based is a mistaken amalgam of three different soldiers of the same name. There is no reliable evidence that any Percy Toplis was at the Etaples camp in 1917.

series. Are you defending the book's implausibilities?

AB: The cannon-fodder view of history will be a lot harder to present from now on, and directly due to your rat-like abandoning of a ship that refused to sink, despite you.

JP: Allison and Fairley's book does not present a cannon-fodder view of history (whatever that may be). The working class have never had too many problems in working out the historical score and acting accordingly. Even allowing for the staggering odds stacked against them, the rank and file of the British and Imperial forces during the First World War were far from completely subservient - as the



writings of Angela Forbes, Vera Brittain, Tom Wintringham, Robert Graves, Henry Williamson, Charles Carrington, Gloden Dallas and Doug Gill, and Dave Lamb have all testified. As for abandoning the ship, I understood the BBC had decided to maroon me many months ago - I wasn't even on board. What was it like weathering the press-inspired storm in the company of egalitarians like Bill Allison, John Fairley, Bill Cotton and Michael Grade? I'd like to have seen the experience discussed on 'Right to Reply', but the BBC were too coy and apparently declined to appear.

AB: Are you proud? Just remember Norris McWhirter is on your side. Congratulations.

JP: Pride has little to do with my role in the TV series production. Norris McWhirter's location is nowhere near me, otherwise I'd have smelled him. I didn't carry out the series' research for congratulations, I was paid for my labour. I even bought a bottle of Nicaraguan rum to celebrate the production's launch.

AB: Open your Nicaraguan rum, toast all the enemies of Nicaragua who have held your hand recently, and then pour the rum over your fucking head.

JP: I shouldn't open the bottle - it's the prize in my competition to prove that Percy Toplis was within a hundred miles of Etaples Camp in 1917. If you can identify which enemies of Nicaragua have held my hand recently I'll denounce them to the People's Revolutionary Tribunal. They'll probably get a fair trial and be liable to spend the rest of their days watching re-runs of 'Days of Hope'.

AB: I have no wish to enter into the public debate, whereupon every rabid dog has its day, for why should I dignify filth by replying?

JP: Quite right! On behalf of the Rabid Dogs Opposition Tendency, however, I did notice that your

literary agents ignored your principled stand and complained to The Listener after the magazine published Fritz Spiegel's criticisms of your work. In any case, Allison and Fairley did a passable job, albeit indirectly, defending 'The Monocled Mutineer' on your behalf. But I'm genuinely impressed by Romantic Socialists who don't dignify filth by participating in public debate - mere mortals don't have much choice about such matters.

AB: I have been equally muted about your contribution, but I have all your notes, comments and tapes, and really I could clearly illustrate you to be a pompous, useless, muddled and Machiavellian tosspot.

JP: I'm deeply moved that you should hold the work of a historian of negligible standing in such esteem as to keep all my notes, comments and tapes. But personal abuse is no substitute for reasoned argument - I'm not altogether certain that the points you've made have any rational basis.

AB: I did my best to keep you from disaster and away from yourself, but I obviously failed.

JP: Not everyone can be successful all the time, but I obviously appreciate your efforts to keep me away from disaster; I've had no success at keeping me from myself either. There's no success like failure, and failure's no success at all..."

(At this point the dialogue is interrupted when the ghost of Percy Toplis appears, admits that he's really Yosser Hughes and hums a swift snatch of "Trench Foot Rock". The parties look on in silent disbelief).

You do have my permission (as does anyone else) to quote from my letters, including this politically astute version of the greater truth about the screening of 'The Monocled Mutineer'.

All the best, Julian Putowski



## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONSHIPS

## Sexuality told differently

Nickie Roberts  
The Front Line  
 Grafton Books, £2.95

Rosemary Daniell  
Sleeping with Soldiers  
 Grafton Books, £2.95

Antony Easthope  
What a Man's Gotta Do  
 Paladin Grafton Books, £3.95

THREE BOOKS about sex - two are great reads and one is a slog. In The Front Line Nickie Roberts writes about her years as a Soho stripper, how she got into it, how she got on in it, and how she eventually had to leave it. Writing the book was a cathartic exercise that was necessary but did not come easily to her. Nor will reading it come easily to those with preconceived ideas about the sex industry, whether for or against.

The author is against strip-shows and the other products of the sex industry, seeing them as a symptom of something very sick in our society's sexual relations. But she uses the term 'sex industry' because she sees a close identification between that work and ordinary jobs - in both cases women are driven by economic necessity to do work they don't want to do, for bosses keen to exploit them.

So, she is angered by the commonly held assumption that workers in the sex industry are 'different'. She describes the gulf she felt between herself and feminists, the lack of comprehension and even hostility

she met when she was hoping for solidarity and support - clearly a class divide. For her and her colleagues, feminist marches through Soho were not good news; they felt themselves the target of the marchers' anger, and were worried that their jobs might be threatened.

But if stripping was degrading and required a constant effort to turn off your mind from what you were doing, it also had its advantages. These included comparatively good wages and a great sense of solidarity among the workers; also a chance to be creative and a degree of job satisfaction not to be found on the production line. Creativity in your exploitation - isn't that contradictory? Yes, but so is life, and Nickie Roberts acknowledges and explains how these contradictions are lived rather than pretending that they don't exist. An eye-opening book if you want to open your eyes.

Feminist poet Rosemary Daniell's book Sleeping with Soldiers is also a challenge to those with narrow feminist ideas - rather than write about macho man from a distance, she decided to find him, fuck him, and see what he was really like. And she wasn't driven just by a salutary belief in the value of field work, but by a need to express her own desires, long suppressed by her rigid upbringing in the southern USA.

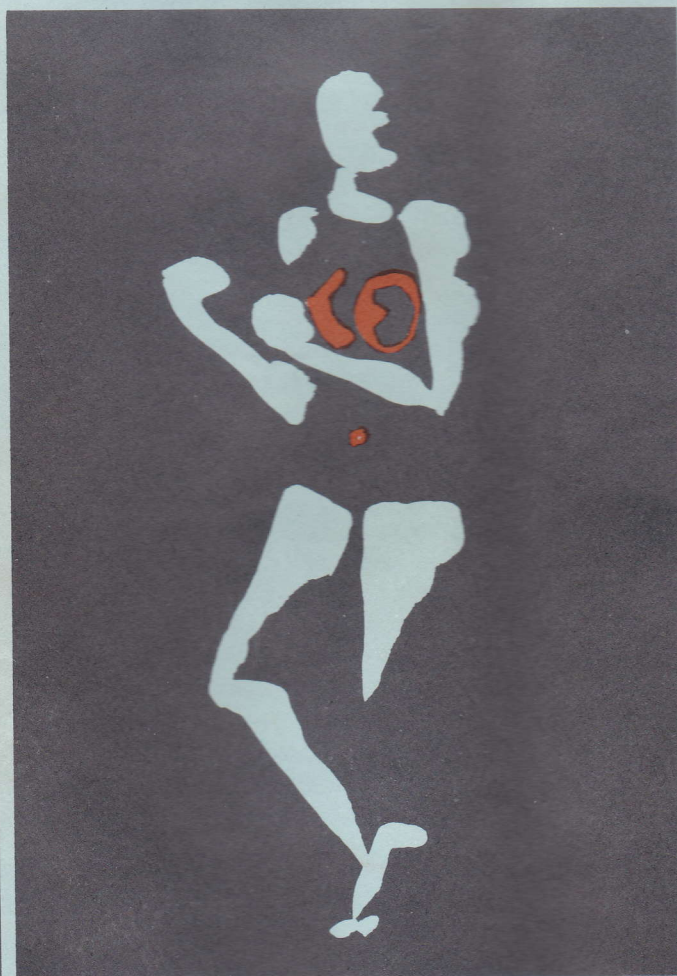
We're familiar enough with macho man's bad points, but the writer, convinced there's a bit of a macho inside herself trying to get out, puts him into perspective. In doing so she draws out his - or their, since obviously there's all kinds - good points, making them human and more understandable in the process. Along the way she discovers a lot about her own sexuality. Again, a great read if it's life rather than



theory that turns you on. (And am I wrong in thinking that you have to go to the US to get this kind of feminist writing?)

So to What A Man's Gotta Do, a look at the myth of masculinity as expressed in popular culture. Unfortunately we look through the lens of freudianism with some Lacan corrections, which may give the result theoretical purity but doesn't give us textual clarity. So unlike the previous two offerings, it's not very accessible which to my mind is a big point against it. I'm not against theoretical accounts - or 'objective' ones, as this attempts to be - but it seems to me we lack the subjective accounts of what it's like being a man without which a theory cannot be constructed. Antony Easthope should have written a book like Nickie Roberts' or Rosemary Daniell's.

NICK TERDRE



Catti Calthrop

## WARTIME RADICALISM

# Pluralism gone unheeded

Class War on the Home Front, Revolutionary Opposition to the Second World War  
Wildcat, £1.50

IT IS NOT OFTEN we get a pamphlet which adds substantially to our knowledge of a portion of our radical heritage, but this 92 page text does just that. It deals with the history of the Glasgow-based 'anarcho-marxist' Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (later the Workers Revolutionary League) between 1938 and 1944. It consists mainly of reprints from its paper Solidarity (no kin!). What a cast list! Anton Pannekoek, Paul Mattick, 'Icarus', Frank Maitland, F A Ridley, and many others who have been forgotten but who deserve to be remembered. Subjects include the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the role of the party. I highly recommend this production.

A few reservations: Wildcat appear to have selected material reflecting the marxist pole of Solidarity's output, and in my view their accompanying text over-stresses the uniqueness of Solidarity; there were quite a few other anti-war revolutionary groups in the period whose history needs to be documented. This valuable text deals with only one of them. It is also ironic that in Wildcat's afterword they conclude their interesting account of this pluralist and libertarian current with a call for a "centralised international revolutionary organisation"!

KEN WELLER

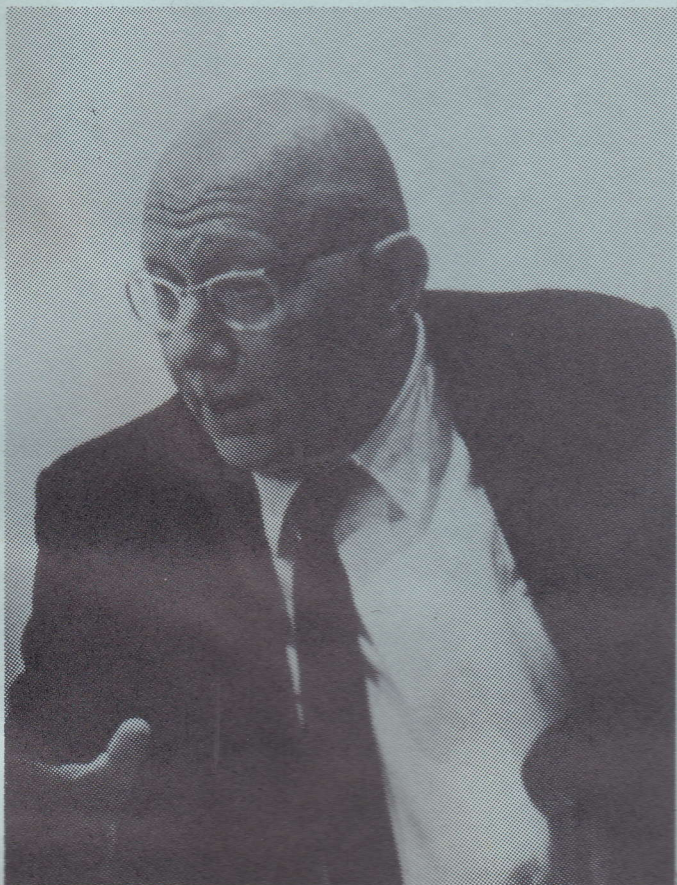
● This publication is available from PO Box 294, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire ST5 1SS.



## EAST-WEST RELATIONS

# Cold War fictions

In our second issue we published an article entitled 'Facing War' by CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS, in which he set out an analysis of the Soviet Union as a society now dominated and directed by the needs of its military machine. This article, and others which he has written, led to much criticism of him as a 'Cold Warrior'. In the following letter, addressed to the editor of the German magazine 'Sozialwissenschaftliche Litteratur Wissenschaft', but which he has asked us to reprint, he replies to this criticism.



Cornelius Castoriadis, speaking recently at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. His book 'The Imaginary Institution of Society' will be published in July by the Polity Press, Cambridge.

Dear PROFESSOR OTTO,

The Sozialwissenschaftliche Literatur Wissenschaft (Issue 12, 1986) published a review by Hauke Brunkhorst of my books so far available in German (Die Zukunft des Revolutionären Projekts, pages 40-45). It is not, of course, my intention to comment upon the review itself, but there is in it a sentence which, irrespective of the undoubted good faith of the author, contains a malevolent and in my eyes slanderous misrepresentation of my views (as Dr. Brunkhorst himself readily admitted in personal conversation).

The sentence in question states: "When Castoriadis today, like all Parisian intellectuals, condemns the policies of detente and welcomes the new missiles of the American President, he may be wrong, but at least he knows what he is talking about. He has never entertained illusions concerning stalinist 'real socialism'" (page 40, emphasis in original).

In fact, I have never condemned the policies of detente, neither could I have done so, for this would have meant that I would have



entered the discussion about better policies for the present Western governments and regimes, something I have consistently refused to do during more than forty years of political writing. I have only explained that 'detente' policies have never prevented the Russians from pursuing their expansionist enterprises - and commented in advance that "to say that the Dillinger gang, in this or that circumstance, is stronger than the Al Capone gang, does not mean either than one admires the former or pities the latter" (Facing War, Fayard, Paris, 1981, page 10).

The notion that I could have "welcomed" the American missiles in Europe is plainly ridiculous. In dozens of talks, interviews, articles, etc. I have always stressed that "to these Western governments and states one can grant neither the slightest confidence on the level of realism, nor the slightest solidarity at the level of principle" ('Which Europe? Which Threat? Which Defence?', Le Monde, 26 February 1983, page 2., reprinted now in Domaines de l'homme, le Seuil Paris, 1986, pages 86-90). More recently, I stated in an interview (22 February 1985) with the Bayerische Rundfunk (reproduced now in F. Rotzer, Französische Philosophen in Gespräch, Boer, Munchen, 1986, pages 46-65): "In any case, I refuse this dilemma (between nuclear war and enslavement). There is the activity of human beings, who can struggle against both governments" (page 65).

The origin of this slander is not difficult to trace. It is to be found amongst those elements in the 'peace' movement who for many years have professionally specialised in explaining how weak and innocent Russia is, and who, instead of refuting my analysis of the Russian regime, its bombs-before-butter policies and its external expansion, find it of course much more convenient and expedient to distort the views of an opponent so that nobody would look at them

seriously and without prejudice.

We all know where, when and by whom these methods were invented. Their resurgence within the so-called 'peace' movement, especially in Germany and Britain, is ominous and disturbing. As this is not an answer to a criticism, but the rectification of misinformation which I consider damaging to myself and the ideas I have come to represent, I would be grateful to see this letter printed in the next issue of SLWR.

Yours sincerely,  
CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS

P.S. I did not enter the Communist Youth "under the leadership", but "under the dictatorship" of Metaxas (1936-1941).

### CLASS WAR

## Rioters without a cause

From NICK TERDRE, London:

One thing you can say about Class War, they don't make any bones about it - their class hatred, that is. It's apparent from the interview in the last edition of Solidarity, but it positively oozes from every line and pic of the group's eponymous paper.

In the Christmas issue - I presume it's the Christmas issue, as the skull and crossbones which form the centrepiece of the masthead are adorned with a festive cap and there is a covering of snow on the letters of the title as they drip with blood, but no mention of a date - you can almost feel it coming off on your hands.

The front page, which provides potential readers with their first impression of the paper and the group, is taken up with a picture



of several riotous youths attacking a policeman as he lifts his hands to defend himself. The legend reads 'There ain't nothin' like a good game of piggy in the middle'. Inside there's a lot more of the same. The above picture comes up again with the legend 'PC Shithead gets a taste of his own medicine... enemies of the working class deserve everything they get'. On the facing page is another pic of two policemen, one of whom has been knocked to the ground and is about to be kicked by one of several black guys confronting them - 'Kicking his fuckin' head in'.

On the inside front page, under the title 'Hospitalised Copper number 8', is the photo of a policeman with a dart sticking out of his neck. Heading: '180! Dopey DC Derek Dickhead dives to duck a dangerous dart... and fails!' Facing is a pic of what looks like a war cemetery with the legend 'We have found new homes for the rich'.

Class War's language is equally violent. For them the police are "filth", Rupert Murdoch "scum", the rich "vermin" or "bastards". There's a feeling of piracy or pillage with the reference to a "middle class area" as a place where "the bounty was better". In fact, you don't even have to come from outside the anarchist ranks to qualify for a sideburst of Class War invective; in the Solidarity interview Ian Bone asserts "We are not a bunch of liberals like Freedom...".

It's all very macho, but that doesn't see to worry Class War. In the interview with Solidarity, Janet says the accusation of being macho is "very sexist because [it] is based on the assumption that violence or anything associated with it, such as aggression or militant action, is a male thing, and the direct inference of that is that women are peaceful 'nice' people who just want to sit down in the road on demonstrations". Yes, but it's still macho, even though women are involved, in the sense of

glorifying violence for the sake of violence. You don't have to be a pacifist - I'm not - to reject the cult of violence masquerading as political action. However, the Class War comrades barely seem capable of raising their sights beyond the next bundle. There's precious little in the paper beyond accounts of riots, demonstrations and picket line clashes with the police. You will look in vain for the "good laugh" claimed by Ian Bone, or even for the lighter material about 'Dirty Den' or Ian Botham he says he would like to see.

The group's role as 'class war anarchists' in the standard riot situation is a little vague. "Obviously, for security reasons" they say, "we cannot go into too much detail about what we must and mustn't do". They reveal, however, that "We must not turn a blind eye to sexism, racism, or pointless muggings/beatings. These things must be confronted on the spot". I agree. Beyond the class hatred, however, the group offers little constructive action. The paper talks of "organising all sorts of resistance in our localities (rent strikes, squatting, riots, beating the shit out of landlords and bailiffs, etc.)" - they can't seem to get away from violence - "and by helping each other out with repairs and other things". Nothing very novel - or detailed - there.

There is one bright note. The writers of the paper state "We are not leaders and must never attempt to be". Thank God for that! It is interesting to speculate on the psychology which lies behind this cult of class hatred. The glorification of violence as an expression of class hatred is typical of the behaviour of fascistic gangs, as Wilhelm Reich might have pointed out. Although Class War claim to be using violence as a means to a political end, the actual role of violence seems to be to provide satisfaction for the (very real) frustrations of oppressed youth. In a brutalised



society, Class War seem stuck within a brutalised perspective, with little idea, or desire, to get beyond it. They say they're anarchist, but all they're doing is providing an up-to-date version of the mysterious cloaked figure who carries a smoking bomb. They're scornful of other anarchists, but their only strategy, if it can be called that, is looking for trouble, and when it comes, upping the ante. What happens after the riot? More riots, and then more? Finally a riotous revolution? Sounds to me like the kind of revolution the police will be only too happy - and prepared - to handle. Meanwhile a lot of people will get hurt and busted, and some killed, but for what?

Class War don't believe we can do much planning. "You can't draw up plans for the anarchist utopia... I don't think it's our job to come up with blueprints, I think it would be a total waste of time", says Ian Bone. But even if we can't draw up blueprints, we can - surely we must - think about how society could be reorganised.

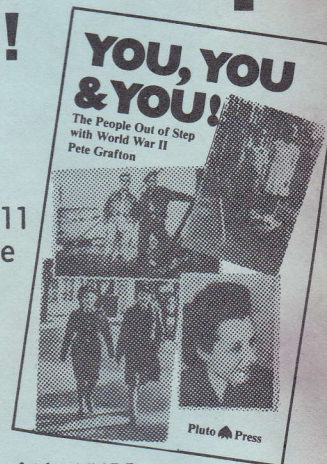
Of Solidarity's pamphlet Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society, Ian Bone says "... there were lots of little diagrams and arrows going round showing how this assembly would elect people to that assembly. That was just worthless". Actually I always thought this pamphlet was one of the most interesting Solidarity ever produced, an insightful attempt to look at how work might be reorganised. There're only two diagrams with arrows, but lots of good hedgehog-enlivened graphics which Ian Bone appears to have overlooked.

When the revolution comes, I'm not sure I'll want to be too near to Class War, and not just because of their mindless fascination with violence. Ian Bone says "We are not a bunch of liberals who believe in freedom of speech; the idea that freedom of speech is an anarchist thing is a load of shit". But the

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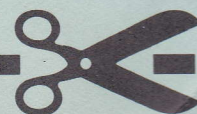
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fight for freedom of speech will probably be a key part of the revolution - we'll be fighting for that among other ends. What worries me when this bunch of boneheads dismiss freedom of speech is, how do they see their means of revolution relating to the end result? And anyway, who will the gag be applied to? Presumably to 'enemies of the revolution' as defined by Class War. But since they're so scathing about Freedom and by implication other anarchist groups, perhaps some of us won't qualify for this freedom in Class War's black and white world.

Underlying all the violent fantasies is a simplistic and romantic view of the world. "The working class is class conscious in the kind of ways Solidarity has held so dear over the years; such as stealing at work, stealing time from the bosses, clocking in for other people, buying stolen goods, the black economy", says Ian Bone. Touche, if Solidarity's notion of the working class consists of no more than this, though I don't think that's the case. I can't say I feel full of revolutionary zeal, or even class hatred, when I knock off a few things from work. There's a lot more to working class consciousness - positive and negative - than this. Ian Bone shows remarkable faith in the working class's capacity for constructive action: "When it comes to the working class changing society then in all previous upheavals they have proved themselves totally capable of creating new forms of organising things". But these things don't happen by magic; what the working class is capable of must reflect its experience. Creation doesn't come from nowhere, and the knowledge necessary for overturning this society and replacing it with something better is not, as far as I can see, going to be much aided by the crass politics practiced by Class War.

Yours

## CLASS WAR

# Hopelessly wrong about freedom of speech

From ANDY BROWN, London:

In Issue 13 you published an interview with some members of Class War which I conducted. Despite a clear statement to the effect that the views expressed were those of Class War and not of Solidarity, a number of people have approached me saying something akin to "I didn't know you'd joined Class War".

To set the record straight, I am impressed by a few aspects of Class War's style, and not at all impressed by others. I think they are very right to say that the Left doesn't bother to talk in the language of ordinary people, and that there is nothing shameful about publishing a paper which is entertaining and written in down-to-earth language. I like the fact that they're openly saying that class conflict is important, and yet managing to link this with opposition to sexism, racism, and terrorism. I disagreed with them most strongly when Ian Bone said that he didn't believe in freedom of speech.

Though I've been on anti-nazi marches I fundamentally do believe freedom of speech to be a very important principle for libertarian socialists. When it is abandoned the way is open for people like Gerry Gable to try to ban the Class Wars of this world. Libertarians are supposed to be committed to Liberty, Equality and Co-Operation, and the liberty bit is just as important as equality. There are other important principles with which freedom of speech occasionally clashes, but I'd say it was one



of the central rights which we ought to be fighting for, not for writing off as "liberal shit".

I also thought Class War hadn't worked out the implications of their type of class politics, in that they only seemed to want to speak for a very narrowly defined working and unemployed class which is actually in the minority in Britain at the moment, and that they had spent very little time working out what kind of changes they concretely wanted to achieve, beyond a generalised concept of revolution. They seemed to be confused to be asked what their beliefs were on health care, and I had the impression that they would have been just as confused to be asked about housing or education. I personally can't see how you can achieve significant change unless you have a reasonably clear idea of what you want to achieve, and I don't think that saying that the working class will sort it out after the revolution is a very satisfactory solution. Ironically, it is only on 'law and order' issues that Class War has said anything constructive. One article in their paper argued that crime was an important problem for many working class people and couldn't just be wished away. Instead they came close to advocating a kind of citizens' militia to replace the police, which is a damn sight more satisfactory than the Labour Left's idea of setting up new police complaints committees, or the general anarchist idea that crime won't exist after the revolution.

I had the feeling that if they wished to go forward they needed to be much more consistently constructive in what they were saying. Simply publishing 'regular features' with titles like 'Hospitalised Coppers Number 54' is about as worthwhile as getting yourself arrested on a tightly controlled march through Hampstead and praying that the nice policemen won't press charges. It was noticeable that Class War themselves were beginning to be

aware of the sterility of this type of approach and that Ian Bone had learned something from his previous experiences. From what I could tell, groups he'd been involved in had experienced a regular history of expanding rapidly and then collapsing through lack of clear direction. If Class War is to avoid the same fate then they need to take themselves more seriously. Their paper needs to move on from repeating the same sick jokes, and to innovate before the pattern becomes sterile and predictable. Their activities need to be organised in such a way that people feel that they are achieving something (just as feminists have, via their single-issue campaigns, not one of which overthrows patriarchy, but each of which helps build confidence and opportunity). They certainly don't need to waste their energies on running headlong into set-piece battles with the police. If they can make the right changes then Class War could fulfill a useful role in creating the Left's re-alignment; if not, then they will simply serve to perpetuate the myth that anarchists are irresponsible hotheads who can occasionally be amusing but who can't organise a piss-up in a brewery.

To my mind, the single most sensible thing they said in the interview was when Ian said that he was fed up with the anarchist movement being a total shambles. I couldn't agree more, but I personally feel that I've got more chance of helping to emerge from that shambles by contributing to the attempts to turn Solidarity into a magazine which can be relied on to produce regular articles which explode the myths created by the rest of the Left. I wish every success to those who have decided to devote their energies to the Class War Federation, but I have the uneasy feeling that it will help burn out far more revolutionaries than it will permanently mobilise.

Yours, hoping I am wrong



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